

## **Sūrah Quraysh**

### **Central Theme**

This *sūrah* is the counterpart of the previous Sūrah Fīl the previous *sūrah*. A comprehensive treatment of the central theme of both these *sūrahs* is given in the exegetical explanation of the preceding *sūrah*. Briefly, it can be restated as: the Quraysh are asked to fulfil the natural right of their association with the Baytullāh, after a thorough indication is made to them about the nature of this association.

### **Relationship with the Previous Sūrah**

In the previous *sūrah*, it is pointed out that the Quraysh are living peacefully and securely in this land because of their affiliation with the Baytullāh. In this *sūrah*, it is asserted that it is this affiliation which also accounts for their provisions of livelihood and sustenance. Both these favours entail the worship of the Lord of this House, instead of associating others with Him without any rational basis.

The foremost things which a good state provides its citizens with are peace and sustenance. In the holy land of Makkah, the Quraysh had been the beneficiaries of these blessings because of the Prophet Abraham (sws) through the Baytullāh. As a natural right of these blessings, the Quraysh should have been grateful to the Lord of this House, but instead they became involved in outrageous forms of polytheism, inducting within its precincts fictitious gods and goddesses. With this background, they are admonished in this *sūrah* to remain deeply conscious of their relation with the Baytullāh – which the Almighty Himself had given in their trusteeship. It was because of the Baytullāh that the whole atmosphere had become peaceful and secure for them; this special status had also been instrumental in securing for them lavish resources of sustenance and livelihood. If they now show ingratitude to the Lord of the House, then they deserve to be deposed from this prestigious position and be divested from all the benefits, both spiritual and material, they possess on account of it.

### **Analysis of the Sūrah**

First of all, a reference is made to the special affiliation of the Quraysh with the Baytullāh and the holy Land of Makkah. Next, an indication is

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made to the trade excursions they regularly undertook in winters and summers, upon which depended their financial prosperity. Their economic well-being heavily relied on these tours and being the custodians of the Baytullāh, success in these tours was virtually guaranteed. Once ousted from this position they could never achieve the privilege of being guided through these routes unscathed, where danger openly lurked for all other tribes.

### Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

لِإِيلَافٍ قُرَيْشٍ (١) إِيْلَافِهِمْ رِحْلَةَ الشِّتَاءِ وَالصَّيْفِ (٢) فَلْيَعْبُدُوا رَبَّ هَذَا الْبَيْتِ (٣)  
الَّذِي أَطْعَمَهُمْ مِّنْ جُوعٍ وَآمَنَهُمْ مِّنْ خَوْفٍ (٤)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

Owing to the association the Quraysh have – the association they have with the winter and summer journeys. So, they should worship the Lord of this House who fed them because of hunger and provided them with peace because of fear. (1-4)

### Explanation

<sup>1</sup> لِإِيلَافٍ قُرَيْشٍ (١)

إِلَافَ الْمَكَانِ وَآلَفَهُ إِيْلَافًا means تَعَوَّدَهُ وَاسْتَأْنَسَ بِهِ (he is used to this place and is familiar with it).

جَعَلْتُهُ يَأْلَفُهُ means آلَفْتُهُ مَكَانَ كَذَا إِيْلَافًا (I made him familiar with this place).

آلَفَهُ مُؤَالَفَةً وَإِلَافًا means أَنْسَهُ وَعَاشَرَهُ (he became accustomed to him, he resided with him).<sup>1</sup>

This explanation clearly shows that there is no essential difference between إِيْلَافًا and إِلَافًا. Both mean attachment, association, and affiliation. Although it is not clear from this first verse with whom the association is implied, yet the subsequent verses qualify the association as the one the Quraysh had with the Baytullāh as its custodians and overseers, as a result of which they had been reaping many benefits.

In other words, the Quraysh are reminded here in this verse that the honour and prestige they had attained in Makkah in particular and in Arabia in general, because of which they had gained extraordinary material benefits, were not because of their own ability and planning, but

1. Owing to the association the Quraysh have.

because of their association with the House of their Lord. They must always remain aware about the nature of this relationship not only with this sacred House but also with its Lord. They should not become inebriated with these worldly successes and thereby forget the rights and obligations imposed on them about this House and its Lord.

إِيْلَافِهِمْ رِحْلَةَ الشِّتَاءِ وَالصَّيْفِ (٢)<sup>2</sup>

*Īlāf* is the permutative (*badal*) of *Īlāf* of the first verse. Initially, the subject had just been raised and left incomplete to raise a question among the addressed people about the nature of the association of the Quraysh. This style has also been adopted elsewhere in the Qur'ān. The style is useful, first of all, to direct the attention of those addressed, and secondly to firmly establish something in their minds by repeating it in two different ways.

This verse explains that the association under discussion is the one the Quraysh have with their trade journeys of summers and winters. It should be kept in mind that during the winter season the Quraysh used to travel to Yemen, while their summers were spent journeying towards Syria and Palestine. With these caravans travelled the wealth of the whole nation. The reason was that there were many traders and businessmen who acted as agents of those who could invest money, and, hence, people who did not go along with these caravans were also able to benefit from this profitable business. It was these tours which were the real source of wealth for the Makkan people. By this means, merchandise reached other markets and at the same time their own consumers were able to buy goods from other markets. Thus, these trade routes were the real source of sustenance for the Quraysh. Although these were international trade routes, yet they were safe in the true sense of the word for the Quraysh only. The extent of protection provided to them was not provided to any other tribe. Other tribes were robbed in broad daylight, and had to seek permission by paying huge amounts to the tribe whose territory they had to pass, but the Quraysh enjoyed unlimited freedom and liberty. They were even provided with people who acted as guides and no one could even think of tampering with them, for they were given a special respect as the custodians of Baytullāh and caretakers of the pilgrims. It is with all this background that the Qur'ān admonishes them not to become inebriated with these worldly successes and forget the Lord of this House. All these successes are due to the Baytullāh, and they shall only remain their beneficiaries if they

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2. – The association they have with the winter and summer journeys.

remain sincere with the causes of the exalted House.

It should be borne in mind, that it was no stroke of luck through which the Quraysh had become the custodians of the Baytullāh. It was not just by chance that they had come from somewhere and settled in its whereabouts, and later became its custodians; in fact, it was the Prophet Abraham (sws) who had purposefully established the abode of his son Ismael (sws) and his progeny in the vicinity of Baytullāh to achieve a certain mission associated with it. He had made a special invocation to the Almighty to bless them with peace and sustenance. In other words, the Quraysh are reminded of their past that they had been settled here for a special purpose. They must fulfil this covenant with all sincerity, otherwise they would be doomed not only in this world but in the Hereafter as well. The Qur'ān says:

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا الْبَلَدَ آمِنًا وَاجْنُبْنِي وَبَنِيَّ أَنْ نَعْبُدَ الْأَصْنَامَ رَبِّ  
إِنَّهُمْ أَضَلُّنَا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ النَّاسِ فَمَنْ تَبِعَنِي فَإِنَّهُ مِنِّي وَمَنْ عَصَانِي فَإِنَّكَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ  
رَّبَّنَا إِنِّي أَسْكَنْتُ مِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي بِوَادٍ غَيْرِ ذِي زَرْعٍ عِنْدَ بَيْتِكَ الْمُحَرَّمِ رَبَّنَا لِيُقِيمُوا  
الصَّلَاةَ فَاجْعَلْ أَفْنِدَةً مِّنَ النَّاسِ تَهْوِي إِلَيْهِمْ وَارْزُقْهُمْ مِّنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ  
يَشْكُرُونَ (١٤: ٣٥-٣٧)

And remember when Abraham prayed: O Lord! make this land one of peace and security. Preserve me and my sons from worshipping idols. Lord, they have led many men astray. Those then who follow my [ways] are of me but for those who disobey me, You are surely Forgiving and Merciful. O our Lord! I have settled some of my offspring in a barren valley near Your sacred House that they may establish regular prayers, so incline people's hearts towards them and provide them with fruits in order that they may be thankful. (14: 35-37)

It is evident from these verses, as mentioned earlier, that Abraham had settled his children near Baytullāh with a special purpose for which it was built. He had prayed to the Almighty to bless them with peace and sustenance and make them a people towards whom everyone would turn in all the affairs of life. The Almighty accepted this prayer, and the Quraysh remained the beneficiaries of these favours in every period. The Quraysh are reminded in this *sūrah* of this very association with the Baytullāh. It would be gross ingratitude on their part to relish all the material benefits from this association, but become indifferent to its

rights and their obligations. The House was built to worship the One and Alone God and prevent people from worshipping idols, and it was precisely for this reason that Abraham (sws) had established the abode of his children in a barren stretch of land. Instead of fulfilling this purpose they had stuffed it with all kinds of idols who reigned supreme in it, in place of the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

فَلْيَعْبُدُوا رَبَّ هَذَا الْبَيْتِ (۳) الَّذِي أَطْعَمَهُمْ مِّنْ جُوعٍ وَآمَنَهُمْ مِّنْ خَوْفٍ (۴)<sup>3</sup>

The verse states the rights of the blessings of peace and sustenance bestowed on the Quraysh by the Almighty. They should be grateful to Him and worship Him with all sincerity. It should be kept in mind, that in spite of being implicated in horrible forms of polytheism, they had never disassociated themselves with the concept of God in their religious beliefs. Not for a moment did they consider any of the idols placed in the Baytullāh as its real Lord. Even a cursory glance at ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s prayer<sup>4</sup> at the time Abrahah attacked the Baytullāh and referred to in the previous *sūrah* shows the essence of *tawḥīd* abounding in it; there is not the slightest indication of invoking help from any other deity, save the real Lord of the House. In fact, the Quraysh only regarded their idols a means to procure the nearness of God – whom they always considered their real Creator and Sustainer, and there never ever came a change in this stance.

الَّذِي أَطْعَمَهُمْ مِّنْ جُوعٍ وَآمَنَهُمْ مِّنْ خَوْفٍ: In this verse *مِّنْ* is that of causation (*sababiyah*) and the words *جُوعٍ* (*jū*) and *خَوْفٍ* (*khawf*) have special connotations. By *جُوعٍ* is meant the specific condition of an area which arises owing to a scarcity of edibles, and by *خَوْفٍ* is meant the state of an area which arises owing to a lack of security and creates a constant danger to life and wealth. Both these words are used in these meanings in other places of the Qur’ān as well:

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ (۲: ۱۵۵)

We shall test you with something of *al-kawf* [fear] and *al-jū* [famine] with loss of life, wealth and crops. (2:155)

The Ḥaram, (land around the Baytullāh) before the advent of Abraham

3. Hence, they should worship the Lord of this House who fed them because of hunger and provided them with peace because of fear.

4. O Lord! a man protects his family, so You protect your people. Their cross and their strength should never overpower You. If you want to leave our *Qiblah* (the *Baytullāh*) at their mercy, then do as you please.

had always remained scarce in food resources and was also in a constant state of strife and unrest. It was because of the Baytullāh that the Almighty blessed the area with peace and ample sources of sustenance. At many instances these favours are recounted in the Qur'ān:

أَوَلَمْ نُمَكِّنْ لَهُمْ حَرَمًا آمِنًا يُجْبَىٰ إِلَيْهِ ثَمَرَاتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ (٥٧:٢٨)

Have We not established for them a secure sanctuary towards which all kinds of produce are being drawn? (28:57)

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا جَعَلْنَا حَرَمًا آمِنًا وَيُتَخَفُّ النَّاسُ مِنْ حَوْلِهِمْ (٦٧:٢٩)

Have they not seen that We have made a sanctuary secure while people are being snatched away from all around them? (29:67)

This *sūrah* is another instance where the same subject is brought up. Both peace and sustenance are special blessings of the Almighty. The Quraysh are admonished here to be grateful to the Almighty and remain aware that this gratitude entails His worship, not revolt, vanity or disobedience.

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